

February 20, 2022

Reference: HB 5176

Benefits and Classification of First Responders.

Chair Osten & Horn, Vice Chair Paolillo, Ranking Members Champagne & Howard and Honorable Members of the Public Safety & Security Committee:

I am writing to you in support of **HB 5176, AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDY OF THE POWERS, DUTIES, BENEFITS AND CLASSIFICATION OF FIRST RESPONDERS**. Everyday in Connecticut, Emergency Dispatchers across the state arrive at work prepared to answer thousands of emergency phone calls. Dispatchers work simultaneously with law enforcement, EMS, firefighters and several other organizations who respond to these crises.

For years, Emergency Dispatchers have been wrongfully omitted from the definition of a First Responder while providing life-saving services to the responding field personnel. Our cohorts provide life-saving interventions such as CPR instruction, application of tourniquets, administration of Narcan and pre arrival instructions for Fire and Police related emergencies. While Emergency Dispatchers may not be responding directly to the scene of an emergency, we share equal responsibility to protect callers as well as the other responders.

The 2002 Homeland Security Presidential Directive defines a “First Responder” as “individuals who in the early stages of an incident are responsible for the protection and preservation of life, property, evidence and the environment...” This definition exemplifies the roles and responsibilities of an emergency dispatcher. This definition also includes “skilled support personnel (such as equipment operators) that provide immediate support services during prevention, response, and recovery operations.” This fails to include Emergency Dispatchers who handle the initial 9-1-1 calls, pre arrival instruction, dispatching and mobilizing appropriate resources to protect responders and victims. In 2021, our state leaders recognized Emergency Dispatchers in the expansion of the PTSD bill, so why would we not include them in the first responder bill?

Emergency Dispatchers, specifically in Connecticut are highly trained personnel and are required to obtain and maintain certifications in many areas. It is essential Dispatchers are capable of making sound decisions, multitasking, and operate under extreme stress while managing individuals dealing with serious emergencies. By classifying Emergency Dispatchers as First Responders we will be able to maintain our workforce with sufficient wages, continue to employ highly skilled professionals and uphold our quality training standards.

Connecticut is constantly reevaluating how public safety is handled in our state and is consistently leading the way to setting exceptional standards for first responders. I embolden our state leaders to expand the definition of “First Responder” to include the hundreds of Emergency Dispatchers throughout Connecticut.

Respectfully,

Aaron Franzi

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